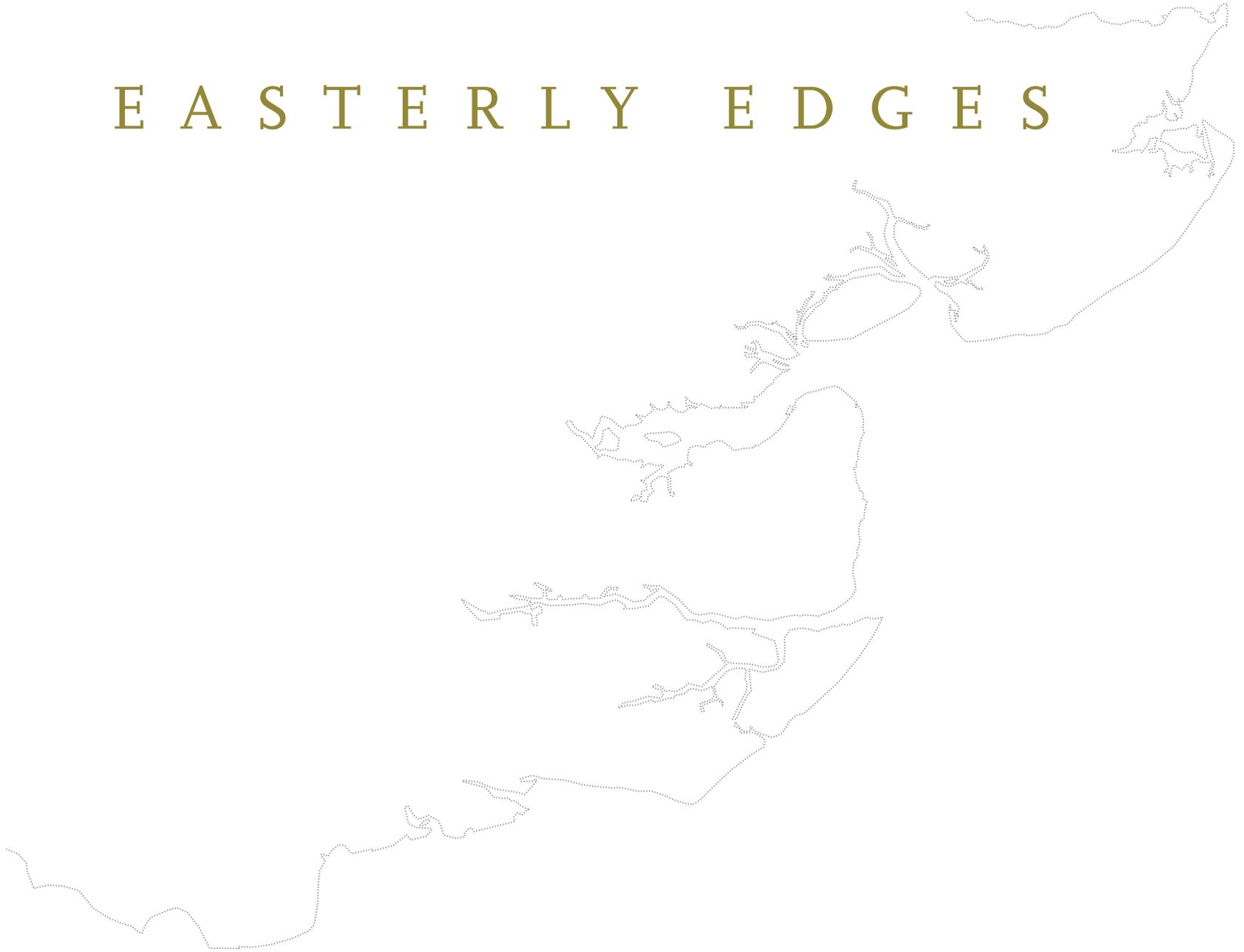


EASTERLY EDGES



JONATHAN DAYMAN

Easterly Edges

Coastlines intrigue. The edges of where our lands meet the sea are special.

Man has, for millennia, used the sea for transport to foreign lands, for trade, for exploration. We have a natural affinity with it. And so the margins of our lands, facing the sea, similarly attract.

Some coastlines intrigue more than others, through their characters, their nature, their shapes.

In shape, the Essex coastline is complex – by a straight diagonal, it is around 55 miles (90km) from Harwich to Grays, but the entire coastline is around 400 miles (640km) in actual length. The difference is in the estuaries and numerous inlets and creeks.

The transitions too are surprising. Within a few miles, wilderness changes to seaside tourism; industrial landscape changes to bleak, pure saltflat; container terminals change to beaches and breakwaters.

As Ken Worpole says in his book *350 Miles*: “it is one of the most complex and historically rich landscapes to be found, bounded on three sides by water, the Thames, the North Sea and the Stour.”

And so, curious, I started walking the Essex coast in 2016, seeking to experience this, and the emptiness, the bleakness, the wildness (and when the wind is rampant and the clouds are dark and rain threatens, it can feel truly wild). As I took photographs, I became very aware of the shapes and textures, the forms and patterns, the geometry before me.

What came to particularly interest me was the impact of human activity on the landscape, and the landscape’s influence on man. The structures, of course, show the passage of time.

Industrial structures are varied and changing, evidence of man’s progress. Some objects are new and in use, like the wind farms; some, as with the numerous rotting barges, are derelict or decrepit and abandoned, reflecting the long history and changing fortunes of this coast. This makes for rich subject matter for a photographer.

The objects in the landscape, sometimes in human form, oftentimes man-made, became my focus.

And as I walked the paths of the coast, visual bells rang. Images from Stephen Shore and Alec Soth, Nadav Kander and Joel Meyerowitz floated into my mind's eye.

Shore's sharp, square buildings and structures and Soth's incidental details-in-a-landscape leapt out at me regularly.

Once back home, the pale colours and modest tonal contrasts of Meyerowitz and Kander gazed at me from my computer screen. The muted colour palette of greys, browns, pastels, were there; the lines and predominant horizontals from the wide, open horizons.

And then I discovered the Dusseldorf school – the Bechers, Gursky, Struth, Höfer and the rest. I saw the slab buildings here, often brutalist; the strong structural shapes; the interspersed verticals from masts, wind turbines and industrial installations.

Is this work landscape photography?

No. It is more than that, I hope, more than simple aesthetics.

I want to make people think, reconsider and reassess their preconceptions and presumptions about an undervalued place, the edges of which, where land meets the sea, are so remarkable.

January 2018

All photographs were taken between
1 April 2016 and 8 January 2018.

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OUT ON THE EDGE

Let us start at the beginning. A landscape without man. No inhabitation, no agriculture, no buildings of any description, no structures other than nature's, nothing but wildness. For long stretches of the Essex coast, it is just like that. Salt marshes stretch out in both directions; seabirds and waders make up animated life; the sound of the wind (which is often plentiful) predominates.

Sometimes it is hard to realise that not far away are major London-connected conurbations and heavy transportation and power infrastructures. It is a gloriously remote space. Birdlife is everywhere, the beautiful varied songs and calls wafting along, modulating on the breezes. They are mesmerising, these stretches, dead flat, forever muted grey and brown (never at all colourful), reflecting a grey sky canopy during autumn or winter days. One feels completely encapsulated by nature. And being so near the edges of the land, it feels even more remote.

I have had very solitary walks here, seeing perhaps one or at most two people during the day – only the odd dog-walker or week-day birdwatcher nearer the main footpaths. Human constructions are limited to the rickety wooden duckboards leading to the shooting grounds, their stark straight-line geometry breaking up a shapeless natural vista.

In winter, it is especially exciting, this remoteness and isolation, when dark clouds skate fast across vast and bleak grey skies, wind rushes past one's head at a rate of knots, and tiny droplets of moisture fizz onto one's cheeks and forehead. It is intoxicating as only wild open-air nature can be. At times, it feels even slightly unnerving.

There is an exception to the lack of man-made structures here: the miles of seawall, atop of which are usually good footpaths. Much – but not all – of the coastline has such a footpath. (Some are out of bounds due to hazardous activity, such as explosives stores or military ranges.)

From these coastal footpaths, there is usually the sea or saltmarsh on one side, and agricultural land – arable or more often pastoral – on the other. Things are changing with fields becoming ever bigger, but the larger fields seem to mimic the vast expanses of sea on the other side of the sea wall.

But... Ken Worpole, in his book *The New English Landscape*, states that 75 per cent of coastal grazing marsh has been lost since the 1930s, and 95 per cent of hay meadows; and of the 30,000 hectares of inter-tidal salt marsh around the Essex coast 400 years ago, only 2,500 hectares remain. What will we have in another 50 years? Maybe looking back from then, these pictures will show what has been further lost, or – with luck – retained.



Near Little Oakley

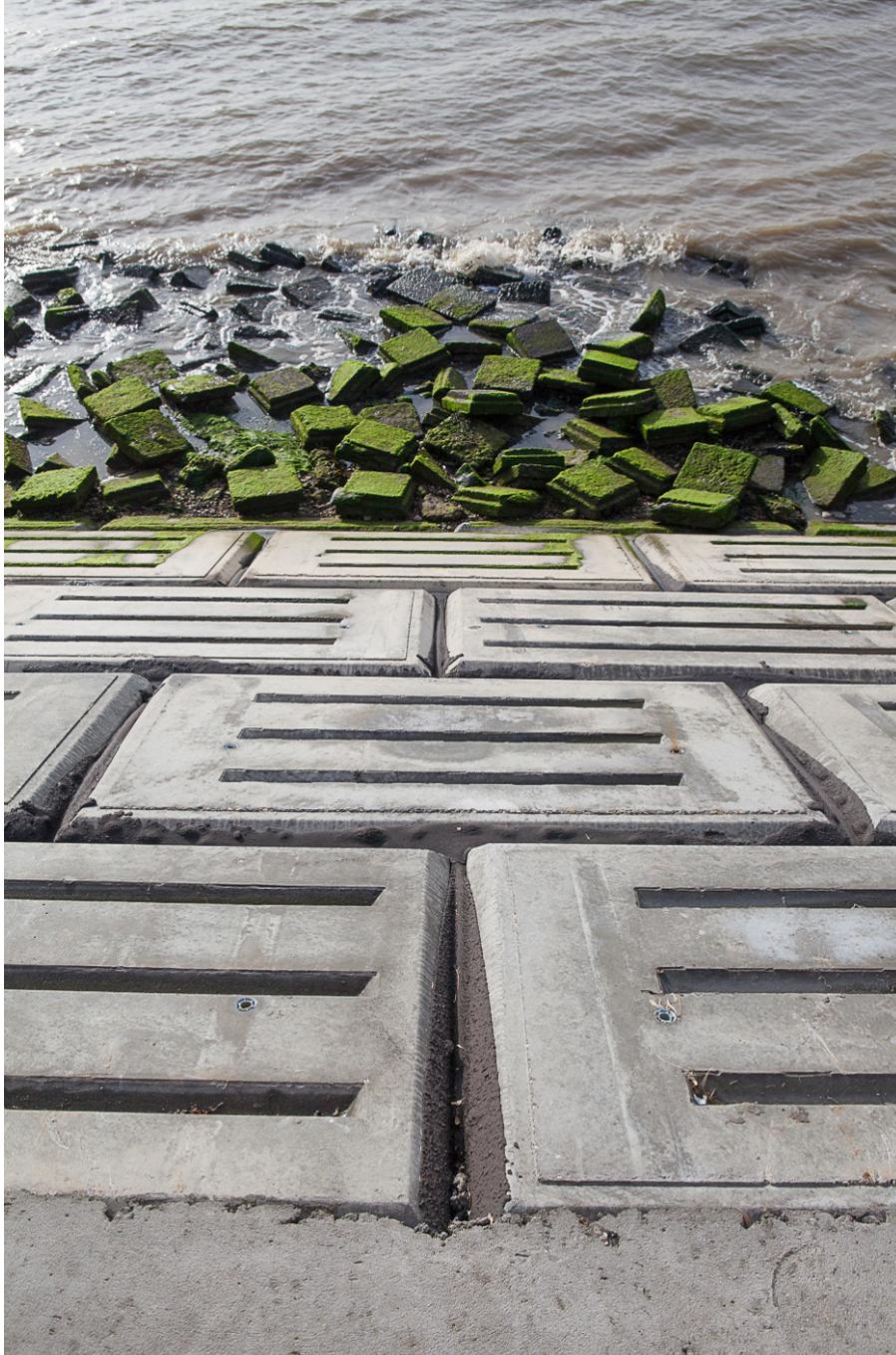


Dengie Peninsula, facing St Peter's Flat





Between Seawick and
Lee over Sands



















ON THE SURFACE

The Essex coast is certainly rich with waterborne history, and interaction with the sea still matters. A long stretch of it borders the Thames estuary, that most significant river. Sea transport was the major means of trade with the capital, London; barges took produce from the fields to the capital and returned with horse manure from the city's streets to feed and nourish the land.

Often the load to London was hay or straw - the large numbers of horses on the capital's streets needed huge amounts of both each day for food and bedding. Equally the animals produced massive amounts of manure.

The transportation was wind-driven, and in the early 20th century there were over 2,000 Thames barges of varying sizes.

They were able to carry between 100 and 300 tonnes at a time along rivers or along the coast, and with all kinds of cargoes – sugar, oats, barley, coke, bricks, cement, hay, sand. They could be crewed by only two men and so were economically efficient and profitable. It would have been a hard life working the barges.

They were a clever design – the flat bottom allowed them to navigate the shallow waters of the creeks of this coast.

By 1954 only 160 barges were still in use, and the last wind-powered freight journey was in October 1970 when 100 tons of cattle cake was sailed from Tilbury to Ipswich.

Nowadays, the Thames barge community tends to centre on Maldon – a barge port for three centuries which now sees five or six barges operating passenger trips and sailing experiences. Barge races (or 'Matches') take place up and down the Essex coast each year, and include a Passage match from London to Harwich, emulating the times when bargemen really did compete to get to their destination port faster than any others.

Today, modern sea transport trade is all about containers.

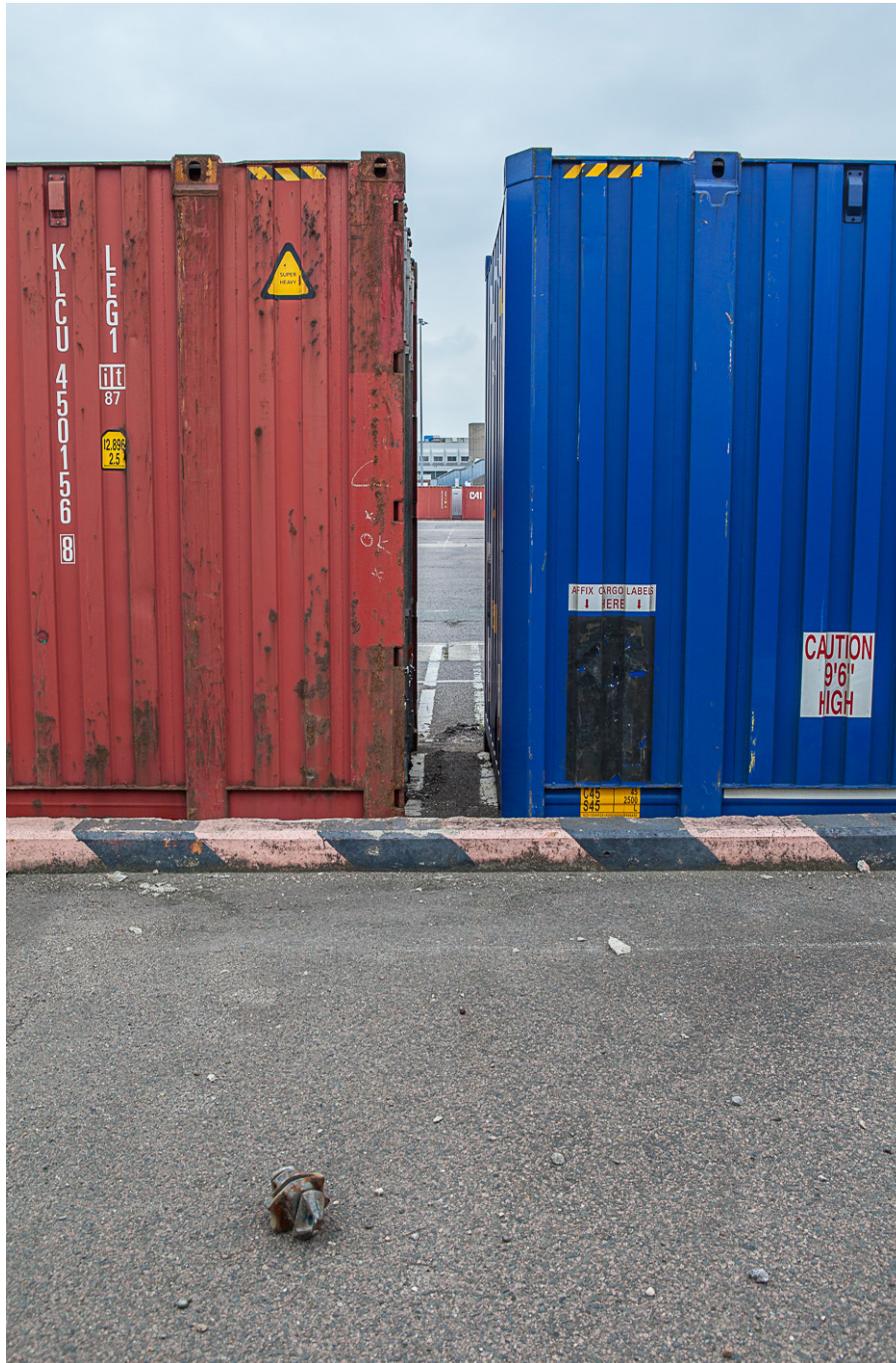
They are a million miles apart from the Thames barges of a century ago. Such a simple and common-sense concept, it transformed the industry and we all now take for granted what they have enabled – that we can buy what we need and desire at any time thanks to the to-your-door global trade in mass-produced goods. Even if we don't need those things, really.

The container ports which make this work are areas of constant 24-hour heavy-lifting activity. Viewing the movements from afar, they are fascinating, each automated transaction carefully planned and measured, the speed and motion moderated to the nth degree to ensure safety and efficiency.

The containers themselves, painted in primary colours and nearly always battered, faded and surface-rusty, are stacked up in long rows and tall columns like bricks, awaiting their turn to be loaded onto their next ship or taken off onto motorways, to be despised by car drivers across the country. It's not the containers' fault: it is our greed for ever more stuff to fill our lives that is to blame.

In another sphere on this coast, leisure sailing in smaller craft is hugely popular. The many marinas, village quaysides and moorings dot the coastline. In some – Tollesbury, for example – you can see how economic trade-by-sail has given way to pleasure-by-sail, with the industry being the upkeep and provisions for the leisure sailing community.









Kirby le Soken





Walton on the Naze

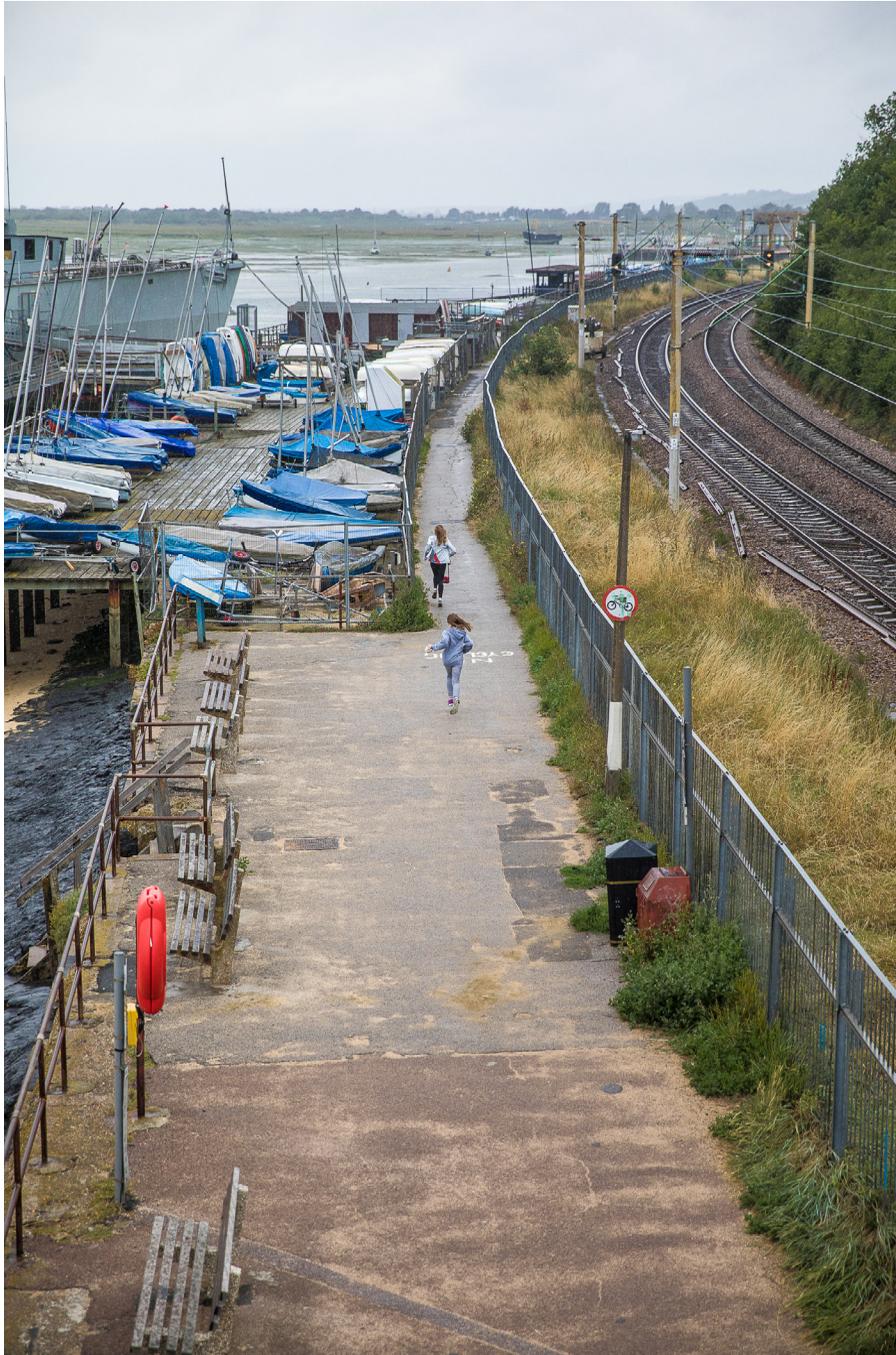












ON THE INSIDE

Where there was man, so there was his shelter, of various sorts and increasingly sophisticated. I muse about a cataloguing, even a typology (rather like that of photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher), of buildings on this coast, such is the variety.

(I realise that I have no picture of a Martello Tower, a few of which have been converted into living accommodation. They must be strange places in which to live, with all the mightily thick stone walling and little natural light.)

The adjacent seaside towns, developed in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, have their own distinctive feel mainly due to their architecture and style of housing. Often handsome townhouses and villas for the rich early on in the development, and more lately bungalows.

Indeed, much of the architecture on the Essex coast is interesting. Some is elegant and traditional – the surviving leisure-born buildings in Southend and Clacton; some is brutalist – Bradwell Power Station, and the wind farms on the Dengie Peninsula (a very elegant brutalism). Some architecture is both brutal and historic – the Martello towers of Clacton and elsewhere.

Caravans form thousands of homes here, some for holiday-time but many of which form permanent housing for those at the losing end of the wealth inequality scale. Some caravan parks are enormous, deserving photographic attention all to themselves.

Yet more is modernist and elegant and stylish – the 1934-36 modernist houses built by Oliver Hill at Frinton-on-Sea, the Bata factory at East Tilbury, the 1931 Royal Corinthian Yacht Club at Burnham-on-Crouch, and the 1932-33 Ove Arup-designed Labworth Seawall Restaurant on Canvey Island.

There are some oddities too. An attractively strange place, Lee over Sands is a collection of 34 individual houses facing the waters of salt marsh and estuary (the Colne), apparently cut-off except for the narrowest of roads. They are a mixed bunch, with a couple of architect-designed and -built houses taking you by surprise, one looking like an aerodrome control tower, and another – on steel stilts – looking like a nuclear bomb shelter or something from Star Wars.











Leigh on Sea









AT THE SEASIDE

There is also lots of seaside.

Developing in the era of Queen Victoria, Essex provided fertile ground for the holiday and day-trip industry. Clacton-on-Sea and Southend-on-Sea (the clue is in the name) grew quickly and other smaller towns sprung up to fill in gaps. The railways made it all possible. Perhaps today they are less fashionable (whilst other coasts further north, in Suffolk and Norfolk, have succumbed to destructive second-home gentrification, Essex remains relatively unaffected) but they are still immensely enjoyable and vibrant places, even in the rain, I'd argue.

Seaside architecture reflects the period in which greatest development happened. The grandest, naturally, is of the early days and then the art deco of the 20s and 30s, after which things slowed down. Grand and majestic buildings which were cinemas and music halls have become amusement arcades or clubs. You have to look through the oftentimes garish signage to see the original handsomeness and grandeur.

At Southend's and Clacton's core, are their piers. Classic British holiday-making architecture. Of Southend Pier, Sir John Betjeman said that "the Pier is Southend, Southend is the Pier". In 1900 around a hundred piers existed; now only half that, and many are crumbling, often damaged or destroyed by fire or stormy seas. Too often in recent years we heard the news that another of Britain's piers has sadly succumbed to fire and collapsed, totally or partially.

They are all so amazingly and wonderfully different, in length and width and arrangement, with varied buildings for refreshment and entertainment on them.

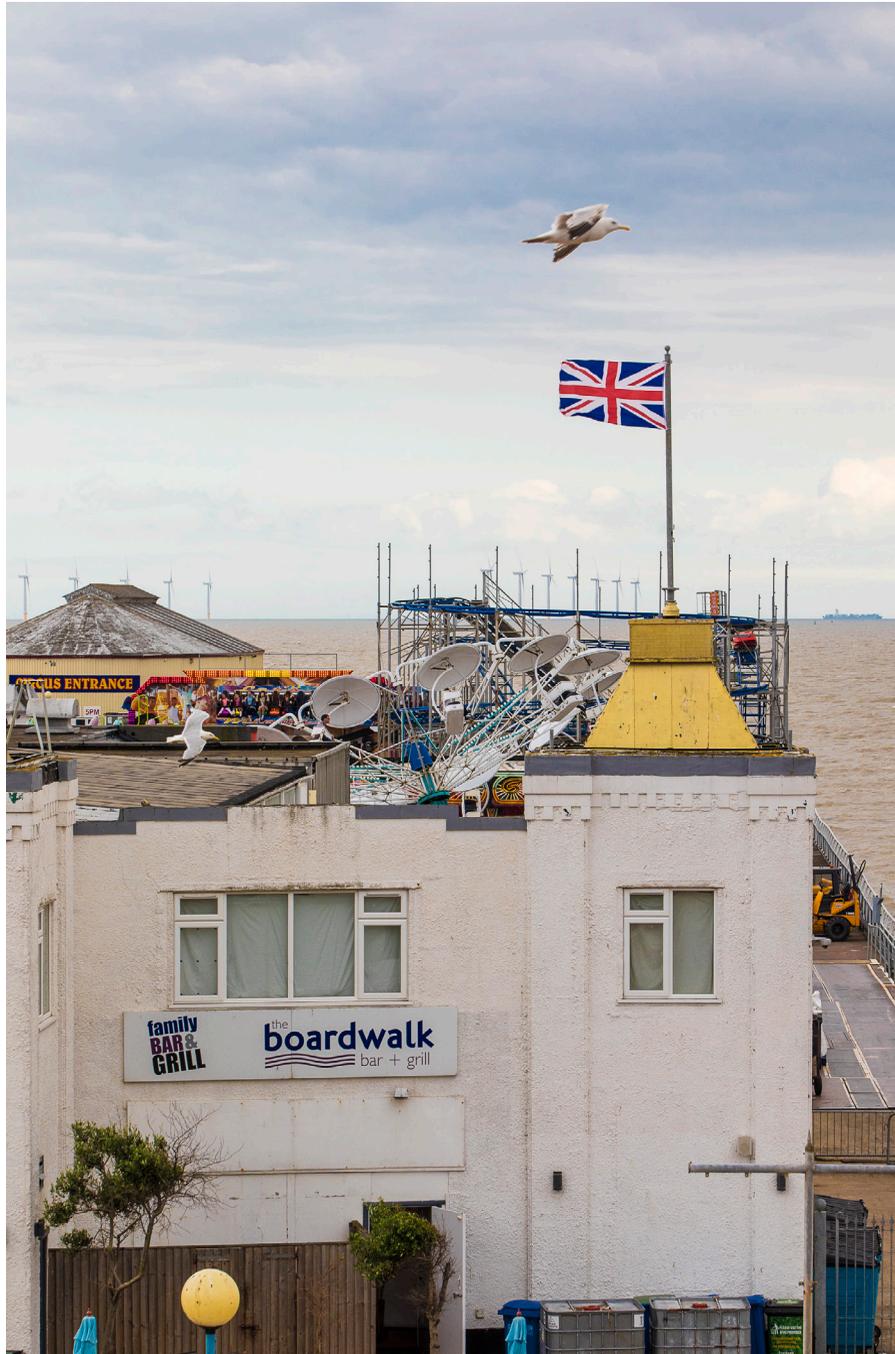
Southend's pier, built in 1887, is the longest in Britain, a mile-and-a-third long. To reach the newly-built pavilion at the end, you can walk it – a bracing experience on a breezy day – or take the little diesel train that trundles up and down. It is novel to look back at the coastline from a man-made structure so far out into the estuary.

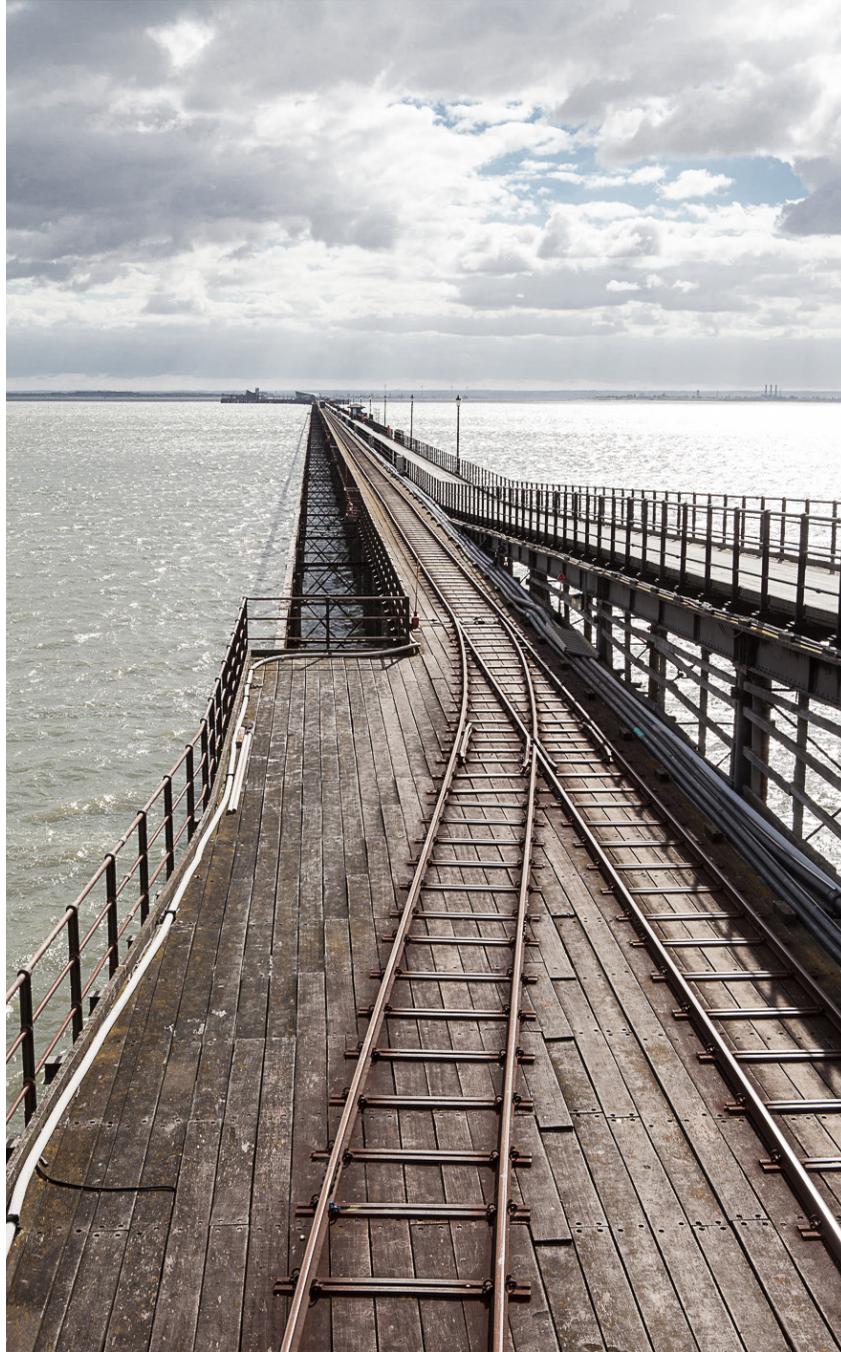
Clacton Pier is different and more holidaymaker-ish. It was the first building in Clacton. All this coastline either side of Clacton was developed quickly in late Victorian and early 20th century times for the new holidaying and day-tripping population of Victorian Britain. Frinton, Jaywick (with its original road system named after motor manufacturers of the 1920s), Walton, Canvey, were all created especially for holidaying, defining this element of the coastline's character, which still prevails.





Southend-on-Sea













Shoeburyness





Clacton-on-Sea









IN THEIR FORM

Some of England's coasts are purely natural, wild, 'unspoilt'. Norfolk, for instance, has been ignored by industry, and likewise Cornwall and Dorset. Some in contrast have been subjected to huge industrial development – South Wales, around the North West estuaries, Humberside.

Essex falls in between.

Nearing London, the 1,100 acres of the Port of Tilbury is now London's main commercial port handling the full range of cargoes. The statistics on the web site state big numbers: "7.5 kilometres of quay, Over 500,000 square metres of warehouse space, over 7 kms of road." And according to Wikipedia, it handles many sorts of bulk goods as well as being the main United Kingdom port for handling the importation of paper.

Tilbury is as varied as it gets along this coast. The aura of the cruise ship terminal reminded me of an airport but distinctively different in subtle ways: more civilised, slower, less claustrophobic, perhaps. Cruise liners depart for distant Australia or nearer Madeira, or the Arctic Circle, Central America, the River Seine. Or you can go around the world in 121 nights. The first cruise berths opened in 1916 for the P&O (Pacific & Oriental) line, the only such berths in the Port of London Authority operations. An Ordnance Survey map of the docks in 1946 shows pretty much the same road system as today but with a network of railway lines, a sign of the change in transportation leading to and from the cruise terminal and freight docks.

Some structures have come into being for reasons other than industry. The Essex coastline, along with Kent's, was in the front line during the world wars, and fortifications are everywhere. Pillboxes regularly dot the coastline itself. Thousands were built during the Second World War, and seven types exist, Types 22-28. Today some are better preserved than others: at Walton on the Naze, some are now fallen into the sea itself. Elsewhere, watch and gun towers still stand watching over the sea, examples of the most brutal architecture.

These indestructible constructions remain ignored and totally unloved – where wartime aerodromes have been dug up and the runway materials used for road construction, or turned into farm roads, business parks or new housing estates, the concrete pillboxes stand forlorn, coldly left to their own devices. What use could ever be made of them? They are small, damp, chilly at best, and windowless apart from tiny gun slits and the narrowest of doorways. A prize to anyone who can make one useable again?

Another element: power generation and transmission. Energy production tends to be a coastal operation, due to its greedy demands for water. Power stations built to be fuelled by fossil fuels or by nuclear energy, and sustainable wind turbines and pylons, all feature right across the coastal landscape here.

Fossil-fueled, and therefore past their usefulness, Tilbury Power Station's two 170-metre tall chimneys are now demolished as part of the de-commissioning. We tend to take what is there for granted, to assume that it will always be there. But change happens suddenly, taking us unawares. The towering chimneys in the picture are gone.

Bradwell Power Station on the Dengie Peninsula is of another generation but defunct nonetheless. It, too, is no longer in operation – being one of the first Magnox nuclear power stations, it ceased generating in 2002 and is now partially decommissioned. Things may not stay that way, however: the Government is considering Bradwell as the site of a new nuclear plant, the development led by Chinese companies.

Construction and destruction – all part of a cycle of man's impact on and interaction with the natural landscape.





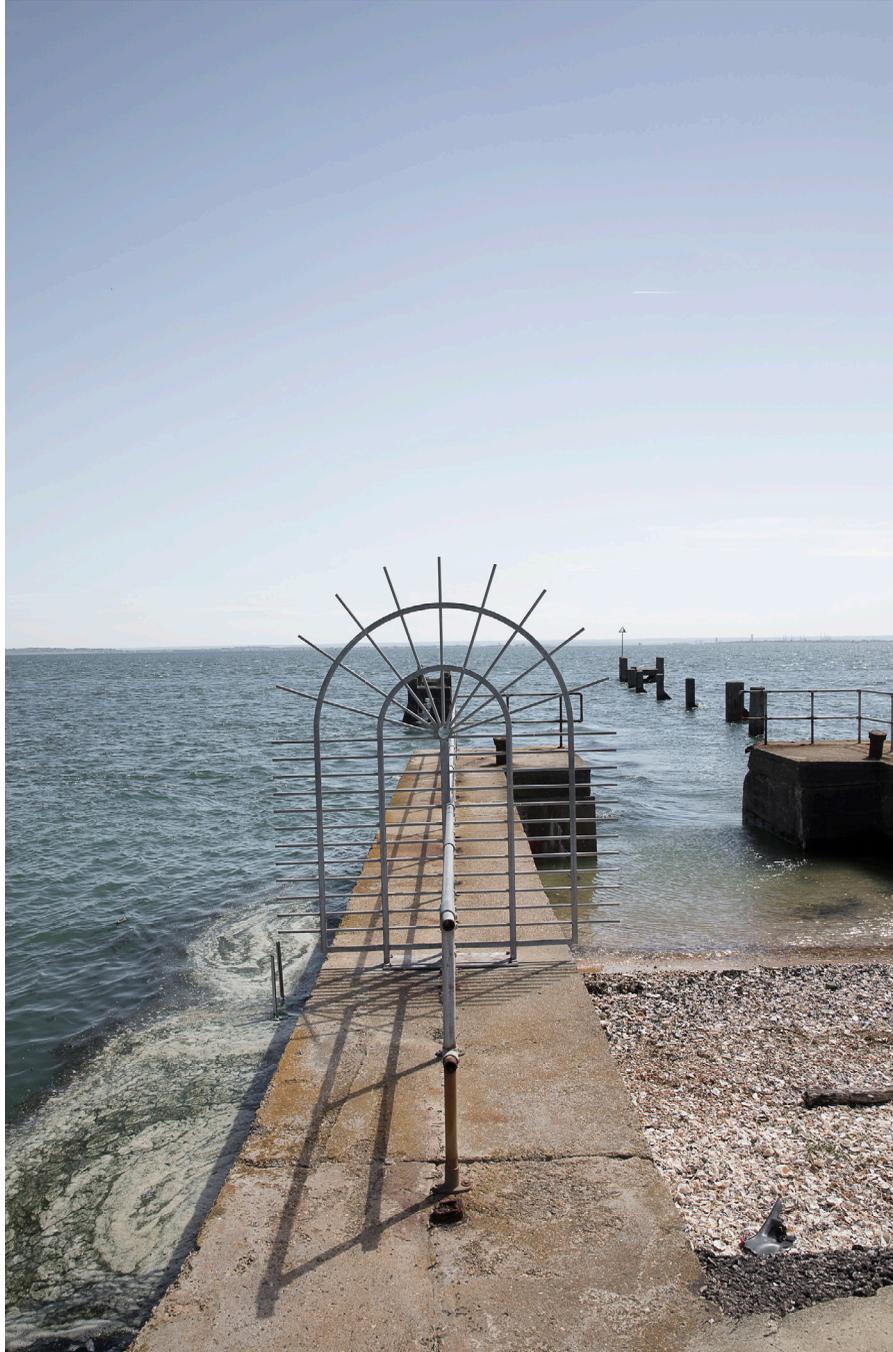


West Mersea











Holliwell Point, Dengie





Lee over Sands









Burnham on Crouch





Jonathan Dayman's largely self-taught photography has progressively developed since his first camera - a Box Brownie, at age 10 – to its present form which centres on landscapes and how human activity impacts them.

He considers his style to be geometric, regularly en face and square-on, with strong graphic forms and lines. He currently shoots in colour, but it is often muted.

His influences are varied, but include classical painters (Hopper, Hockney) and a range of photographers from different eras and schools (amongst them, Lartigue, Meyerowitz, Shore, Gursky, the Bechers, Kander, Haas, Soth).

Easterly Edges

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